



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY  
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO POLAND (MAY 31-JUNE 10, 1997)  
**MEETING WITH THE RECTORS OF THE POLISH UNIVERSITIES**

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II**

*Collegiate Church of Saint Ann  
8 June 1997*

1. *Nil est in homine bona mente melius.* Today, as we solemnly celebrate the six-hundredth anniversary of the foundation of the Theology Faculty and of the foundation of the Jagiellonian University of Krakow, this inscription above the door of the Dlugosz house in Kanoniczna Street in Krakow seems to find a particular confirmation. *Six centuries of history* come before us today, with all the generations of professors and students of the University of Krakow, in order to testify to the fruits borne for the good of mankind, the nation and the Church by that persevering concern for the "*mens bona*" which has been kept alive within this Athenaeum. *How can we fail to listen to this centuries-old voice?* How can we not accept with heartfelt gratitude the witness of those who, in searching for truth, shaped the history of this royal city and enriched the treasury of Polish and European history? *How can we fail to praise God* for this work of human wisdom which, inspired by his own eternal Wisdom, leads the mind towards the attainment of ever deeper knowledge?

I give thanks to God for the six hundred years of the Theology Faculty and of the Jagiellonian University. *I rejoice that it has been granted me to do so here*, in the University Collegiate Church of Saint Ann, in the presence of scholars from throughout Poland. *I cordially greet the Academic Senates of the Jagiellonian University and of the Pontifical Academy of Theology* led by their respective Rectors. I express my gratitude for the words of welcome and the introduction to this solemn academic exercise. I cordially greet all of you, the distinguished Rectors and Pro-Rectors who represent the academic institutions of Poland. I still have vivid memories of my meeting with you in the Vatican at the beginning of last year (4 January 1996). At that time I spoke about what

unites us. We are meeting, in fact, in the name of a common love of truth, and we share *a concern for the continuing advancement of learning in our homeland*. I am pleased that today we can experience this unity once again. Today's solemn ceremony brings this out in a particular way and reveals its most profound meaning. For behold - we can say - thanks to your presence, *all the academic institutions of Poland* - both those of centuries-long tradition and those which are more recent - *are united around this most ancient "Alma Mater Jagellonica"*. They come to her in order to express the fact that they too are rooted in the history of Polish learning, which began with that foundation six hundred years ago.

Let us return together to the sources from which, six centuries ago, were born the Jagiellonian University and its Theology Faculty. *Together we wish to appropriate once more the great spiritual patrimony* which this University constitutes in the history of our nation and of Europe, in order to transmit this priceless treasure intact to future generations of Poles, to the Third Millennium.

2. During this Jubilee celebration we gratefully turn our thoughts *to the figure of Saint Hedwig*, Lady of Wawel, foundress of the Jagiellonian University and the Theology Faculty. Thanks to a wondrous decree of Divine Providence, the celebration of the six hundredth anniversary coincides today with her canonization, so long awaited in Poland, especially in Krakow and its academic circles. This canonization was greatly desired by everyone. The Academic Senates of the Jagiellonian University and of the Pontifical Academy of Theology have expressed this in letters addressed to me.

The holy foundress of the University, Hedwig, knew, with the knowledge proper to the saints, that the University, as a community of people in search of truth, is essential to the life of the nation and of the Church. Therefore she worked perseveringly for the rebirth of the Academy of Krakow founded by Casimir and for its enrichment by a Faculty of Theology. This was an extremely important act because, according to the criteria of the times, *only the foundation of the Theology Faculty gave a university its full rights and a certain ennoblement within the academic world*. Hedwig sought this untiringly from Pope Boniface IX, who in 1397, exactly six hundred years ago, acceded to her requests and erected the Theology Faculty in the Jagiellonian University with the solemn Bull *Eximiae Devotionis Affectus*. Only then did the University of Krakow *begin fully to exist on the map of the European universities*, and the Jagiellonian State rose to the level of the western countries. The University of Krakow grew quickly. In the course of the fifteenth century it attained the stature of the greatest and most renowned universities in Europe at the time. It was put next to the Sorbonne in Paris, or others older than itself, such as the Italian universities of Bologna and Padua, to say nothing of the nearby universities of Krakow, Prague, Vienna and Pecs in Hungary. This golden age in the history of the University bore fruit in many *eminent professors and students*. I will limit myself to mentioning but two of them: Pawel Wlodkowic and Nicholas Copernicus.

Hedwig's efforts bore fruit in another area too. *For the fifteenth century is, in the history of Krakow,*

*the century of saints*, and they too were closely linked to the Jagiellonian University. In those days Saint John of Kety studied and later taught here; his mortal remains rest in this same University Collegiate Church of Saint Ann. And besides him, various others who have the reputation of sanctity received their education here, like Blessed Stanislaus Kazimierczyk, Simon of Lipnica, Ladislav of Gielniów, or Michael Giedroyc, Isaac Boner, Michael of Krakow and Matthew of Krakow. These are only a few of the multitude of those who, travelling the path of the search for truth, achieved the heights of holiness and form *the spiritual beauty of this University*. I think that, during the Jubilee celebration, this dimension too must be given its rightful place.

3. Allow me now, dear Ladies and Gentlemen, to address the *Pontifical Academy of Theology of Krakow*, heir to the Theology Faculty of the Jagiellonian University founded by Saint Hedwig six hundred years ago. Not only in the history of Polish theology, but also in that of Polish science and culture it has played - as I have said - an exceptional role. I have been closely associated with that Faculty, for it was there that I made my studies in philosophy and theology during the occupation and later received the doctorate and the qualification to teach. Today I have before my eyes above all *the years of its dramatic struggles for existence* at the time of the Communist dictatorship. I personally took part in those struggles as Archbishop of Krakow. That painful period merits, from every point of view, careful documentation and a detailed historical study. *The Church never resigned herself to the fact of a unilateral and unjust suppression* of the Faculty by the State Authorities of the time. She did everything in her power to ensure that the university environment of Krakow was not deprived of an academic "studium" of theology. Despite numerous difficulties and obstacles on the part of the Authorities, the Faculty continued to exist and function at the Major Seminary of Krakow. *First as a Pontifical Faculty of Theology*. Later the situation evolved to the point that the *Pontifical Academy of Theology* could be established in Krakow as an athenaeum made up of three faculties, in spiritual continuity with the ancient Theology Faculty of the Jagiellonian University. How then can I fail today, on the occasion of this Jubilee celebration, to give thanks to God who has enabled us not only to defend this great spiritual treasure of the Theology Faculty, but also to enlarge it and grant it a new, even more prestigious academic status? And thus the Pontifical Academy of Theology, together with other Catholic centres of learning in our homeland, is making its own contribution to the development of Polish learning and culture, while remaining a particular *witness of our times* - times of struggle for the right of theological athenaea to have a place in the academic landscape of present-day Poland.

4. Today's Jubilee celebrations bring to my mind a series of questions and reflections which are general and quite fundamental: What is a university? What is its role in culture and in society? *Alma Mater. Alma Mater Jagellonica...* This is the name by which the University is known, and it has a profound significance. *Mater* - mother, namely, the one who gives birth, educates and trains. *A university bears some resemblance to a mother*. It is like a mother because of its maternal concern. This is a spiritual concern: that of giving birth to souls for the sake of knowledge, wisdom, the shaping of minds and hearts. It is a contribution which is absolutely incomparable. Personally, years later, I see ever more clearly *how much I owe to the University*: love for the Truth and

knowledge of the ways to seek it. A major part was played in my life by *the great professors* whom I had the opportunity to know: persons who enriched me and continue to do so by their spiritual grandeur. I cannot resist the heartfelt urge to mention today the names of at least some of them: Professors Stanislaw Pigón, Stefan Kolaczkowski, Kazimierz Nietsch, Zenon Klemensiewicz - all from the Faculty of Letters. And with them the professors of the Theology Faculty: Father Konstanty Michalski, Jan Salamucha, Marian Michalski, Ignacy Rózycki, Wladyslaw Wicher, Kazimierz Klósak, Aleksy Klawek. How many experiences and how many people are hidden behind the name: *Alma Mater!*

*The vocation of every university is to serve truth:* to discover it and to hand it on to others. This was eloquently expressed by the artist who designed the Chapel of Saint John Kety which adorns this Collegiate Church. The sarcophagus of Master John has been placed on the shoulders of figures personifying the four traditional Faculties of the University: Medicine, Jurisprudence, Philosophy and Theology. This brings to mind precisely the image of the University, which, through the work of research carried out by many scientific disciplines, gradually approaches the supreme Truth. Man transcends the boundaries of individual branches of knowledge in order to direct them towards that Truth and towards the definitive fulfilment of his own humanity. Here we can speak of the *solidarity of the various branches of knowledge* at the service of man, called to discover ever more completely the truth about himself and the world around him.

Man has a lively awareness of the fact that *the truth is above and beyond him*. Man does not create truth; rather truth discloses itself to man when he perseveringly seeks it. The knowledge of truth begets *a spiritual joy (gaudium veritatis)*, alone of its kind. Which of you, dear Ladies and Gentlemen, has not experienced in greater or lesser measure such a moment in your work of research? I hope that moments of this kind will be frequent in your work. In this experience of joy at having known the truth we can see also a confirmation of man's transcendent vocation, indeed, of his openness to the infinite.

If today, as Pope, I am here with you, men and women of science, it is to tell you that *the men and women of our time need you*. They need your scientific curiosity, your perceptiveness in asking questions and your honesty in trying to answer them. They also need that specific transcendence which is proper to Universities. The search for truth, even when it concerns a finite reality of the world or of man, *is never-ending, but always points beyond* to something higher than the immediate object of study, to the questions which give *access to Mystery*. How important it is that human thought should not be closed to the reality of Mystery, that man should not become insensitive to Mystery, that he should not lack *the courage to plunge into the depths!*

5. There are few things as important in human life and society *as the service of thought*. The "service of thought" to which I am alluding is essentially nothing other than the service of truth in its social aspect. Every intellectual, independently of his personal convictions, is called to let himself be guided by this sublime and difficult ideal and to *function as a critical conscience*

regarding all that endangers humanity or diminishes it.

*Being a scholar entails obligations!* First of all, it entails the obligation of a particular concern for the development of one's own humanity. Here I wish to recall a man known personally by many of those present and by myself as well. Linked to the scientific circles of Krakow, he was a professor at the Polytechnical Institute of Krakow. To our generation he became a particular witness of hope. I am thinking of the *Servant of God Jerzy Ciesielski*. His passion for science was inseparably linked to an awareness of the transcendent dimension of truth. He united the meticulousness of a scientist and the humility of a disciple striving to hear what the beauty of the created world tells us of the mystery of God and of man. *He turned his service as a man of science, his "service of thought" into a path to holiness.* When we speak of the vocation of the scholar we cannot ignore this perspective either.

In the daily work of a scholar a particular *ethical sensitivity* is also needed. For it is not enough to be concerned about the logical, formal correctness of one's thinking. The workings of the mind must necessarily be nourished by the spiritual climate of indispensable moral virtues like sincerity, courage, humility, honesty, and an authentic concern for man. Moral sensitivity makes it possible to preserve a *connection between truth and goodness* which is very essential for science. These two problems cannot in fact be separated! The principle of freedom of scientific research cannot be separated from the *ethical responsibility* of every scholar. In the case of men and women of science this ethical responsibility is particularly important. Ethical relativism and purely utilitarian attitudes represent a danger not only for science but directly for individuals and for society.

Another condition for a sound development of science which I would like to emphasize is *an integral notion of the human person*. Here in Poland, the great debate on the theme of man in no way ended with the fall of Marxist ideology. It continues, and in some ways has even intensified. Debased forms of understanding the human person and the value of human life have become more subtle and for that reason more dangerous. Today there is need of *great vigilance* in this area. Here a vast field of activity opens up before the Universities, for men and women of science. A distorted or incomplete vision of man can easily make science change from a blessing into a serious threat to humanity. The great progress made by scientific research today fully confirms such fears. *From being a subject and goal*, man is not infrequently considered an object and even a form of "raw material"; here we need only mention experiments in genetic engineering which are a source of great hope but at the same time of considerable preoccupation for the future of the human race. The words of the Second Vatican Council, which I frequently refer to in my meetings with men and women of science, are truly prophetic: "Our age, more than any of the past, needs such wisdom to humanize man's discoveries. *For the future of the world is endangered unless wiser men are forthcoming*" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 15). This is the great challenge which academic institutions today face in the fields of research and teaching: the training of men and women not only competent in their specialization or full of encyclopedic knowledge, but above all endowed with authentic wisdom. Only people with this kind of education will be capable of shouldering

responsibility for the future of Poland, Europe and the world.

6. I know that scholarship in Poland is presently at grips with many difficult problems, as for that matter is the whole of Polish society.

I spoke of this at greater length at the meeting in the Vatican with the Rectors of the Polish Universities. Nevertheless, *signs of hope* are not lacking. Polish scholars, often in very difficult conditions, are carrying on with great dedication the work of research and teaching. Not infrequently they attain significant positions in the world of learning. Today I wish to express my heartfelt esteem for all committed to the promotion of Polish scholarship, my appreciation of their daily efforts, and my congratulations on their achievements.

*Thank you so much for this meeting!* I have greatly looked forward to it as a means of testifying once more that questions of science are not indifferent to the Church. Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you always to know that the Church is with you - and, in conformity with her mission - desires to be at your service. I ask those present to convey my cordial greetings to the Academic Senates, professors, teaching staff, administrative and technical personnel and the young university students of the Institutions from which you come.

In conclusion, I address the *venerable Jubilarians*: the Jagiellonian University and the Pontifical Academy of Theology, and I offer my best wishes for an abundant outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for their further service to Truth.

Invoking the intercession of our Holy Patrons, Saint Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr, Saint John of Kety and Saint Hedwig, foundress of the Jagiellonian University and of its Theology Faculty, I cordially impart to all of you my Apostolic Blessing: in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.